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Pentagon Leapfrog

Not many weeks ago, the Defense Department let out another of its unceasing cries of "Wolf" by saying the Soviet Union was embarked on a program of constructing launching silos for a modified version of its SS-9 intercontinental missile or possibly an entirely new missile.

With that cry, Defense Secretary Laird said the department might have to ask for more money for more strategic weapons.

A few days ago, Senate Republicans said a CIA report indicated the Soviet construction program was NOT for new missiles spoken of by the Defense Department, but was merely an upgrading of sites for its relatively modest SS-11 intercontinental missile.

Now comes Round 3. The Pentagon, in one of those contradictions in which it is so competent, says two things. It says there is no basic disagreement between its assessment of the Soviet undertaking and that of the CIA. Then, in its second breath it says the construction program may not be for one new type of missile but for TWO.

What we have here is the Defense Department playing leapfrog over the CIA. It starts with one new Soviet missile, then leapfrogs over the CIA assessment of no new missiles and comes up with two new missiles.

It is a great game for the Pentagon. But we can't help but remember that the stakes it plays with are our lives and our money.